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AUTHOR Brown, Sandra; Williams, Michael
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ABSTRACT

This study of educational provisions in Western Australia, an area of 2.5 million square kilometers with a mere 1.2 million inhabitants, provides a broad picture of the complex, difficult, and expensive undertaking of providing education to a small, widely-spread population which differs in demographic, economic, and cultural characteristics. The context within which these educational provisions are made is complex, involving the isolation of families on stations, farms, construction camps, or fishing bases; the impermanence of residence; the lack of "feeling of community"; the limited occupational, cultural, and intellectual opportunities of town residents; and the strong tribal-traditional identities retained by the outback Aborigines. Areas of the educational structure of particular relevance to sparsely populated Western Australia include the distribution of schools, staffing, professional development of teachers, school resources and facilities, curriculum, and academic achievement of students. Special provisions required to meet student needs include school transport services, facilities for boarding away from home, correspondence schools, two-way radio Schools of the Air, Isolated Students Matriculation Scheme, assistance for exceptional and Aboriginal children, the Disadvantaged Areas Program, and the pre-primary Rural Integration Programme. (NEC)

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STUDIES IN RURAL EDUCATION

EDUCATIONAL PROVISION IN SPARSELY POPULATED AREAS OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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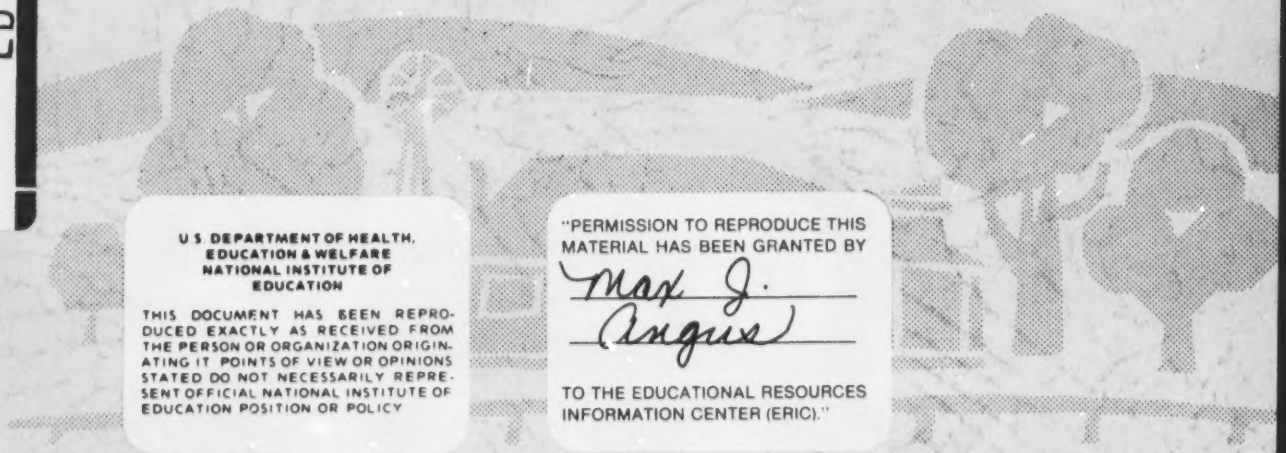

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STUDIES IN RURAL EDUCATION NO. 1

EDUCATIONAL PROVISION IN SPARSELY POPULATED AREAS

RESEARCH BRANCH

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

March, 1979

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FOREWORD

This report is the first of a new series of publications known as Studies in Rural Education. The commissioning of this series reflects the importance which the Education Department of Western Australia attaches to providing the highest quality of education in country regions.

While the Department's record in rural education has been creditable - I believe this first publication attests to the fact - all too often the background to the policies and initiatives undertaken has not been available for professional and public comment. This series is intended to rectify that situation by making available a number of research and discussion papers reflecting current Departmental thinking and initiatives in rural education.

The first paper in the series is a general description of the nature and extent of educational provision in the more sparsely populated regions of the State. The substance of the paper was drawn from material prepared for an international project conducted under the auspices of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Western Australia represented Australia in this project, and participated with ten member countries of OECD. Western Australia contributed case studies on the Chidley Education Centre and the Isolated Students Matriculation Scheme to the project. These case studies are likely to be included as future contributions in this series.

I wish to thank the authors of this first report, Ms Sandra Brown and Mr Michael Williams of the Research Branch, and the other Departmental officers who assisted with the report's compilation.

D. Mossenson

D. MOSSENSON,
DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF EDUCATION

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1. INTRODUCTION

Western Australia is by far the largest State of the Commonwealth of Australia, occupying 2.5 million square kilometres, an area approximately the same as Western Europe. In contrast to its vast size, its population is a mere 1.2 million people. Moreover, a demographic sketch of Western Australia shows that almost 90 percent of this population is concentrated within 400 kilometres of Perth, the capital city (see Figure 1). The remaining 180,000 people thus occupy almost 90 percent of the State's area. In this sparsely populated 90 percent of the land mass, the average population density is less than one person per 10 square kilometres. Some areas, of course, have much lower population densities. The Shire of Sandstone, for example, has an average of one person to every 400 square kilometres.

Thus, Western Australia's vast expanse, its small population and its uneven distribution of people combine to make provision of community services, including education, a difficult and expensive undertaking. Not unexpectedly, therefore, education in sparsely populated areas is a topic of great interest and relevance in this State.

This paper describes the educational opportunities which are made available in sparsely populated areas of Western Australia. To this end, there are three parts to this paper. Firstly, Chapter 1 describes the context within which these educational provisions are made. Selected aspects of life in the sparsely populated areas of Western Australia are discussed, highlighting those conditions with special implications for school systems.

Secondly, in Chapter 2, general patterns of education in this State are characterized. This description highlights those educational provisions which provide the flexibility which enables the educational system to meet the needs of both people in sparsely populated areas and those in more populous areas.

Thirdly, Chapter 3 contains a description of those educational provisions which are specifically designed to accommodate the special needs of people in sparsely populated areas.

For the purposes of this discussion, four regions within the State Education Department, namely the Kimberley, Pilbara, Goldfields and Geraldton regions were selected as illustrative of sparsely populated areas. As shown in Figure 1, large proportions of these regions are among the most sparsely populated areas of the State.

A study of educational provisions in these regions will provide a broad picture of the complex and difficult undertaking of providing education to a widely spread population which differs in demographic, economic and cultural characteristics.

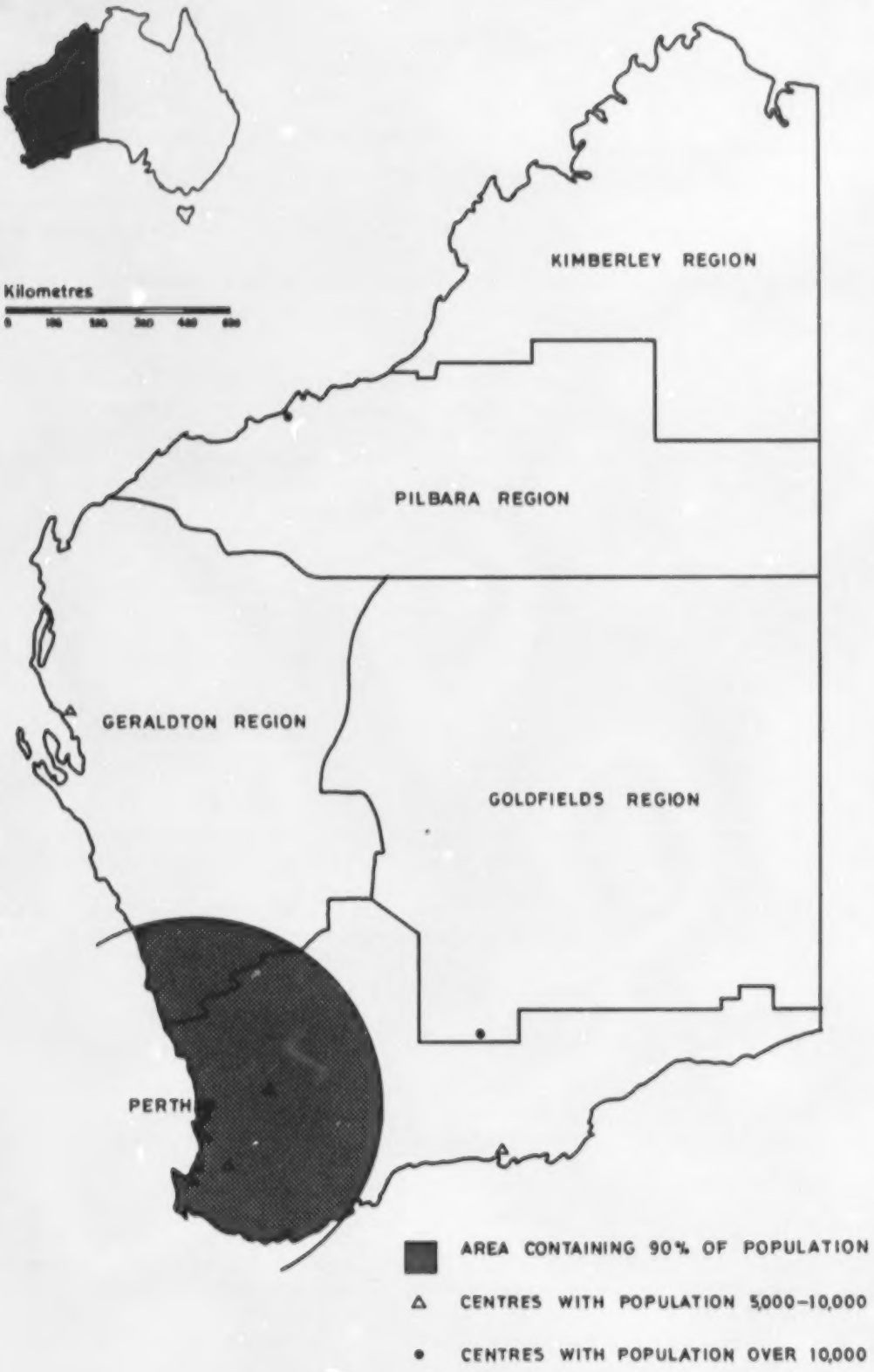

FIGURE 1: Western Australia, Showing Population Distribution in Relation to Educational Regions in Sparsely Populated Areas.

2. MAJOR PROBLEMS FACING EDUCATORS IN SPARSELY POPULATED AREAS

In an area as large as the sparsely populated area of Western Australia, it is not surprising that there exist diverse groupings of people with different patterns of settlement and life-style. Each group presents to educators its own set of needs and problems, and thus educational provisions for each group tend to differ.

For instance, the Kimberley region comprises mainly stations and mission settlements plus small iron ore mine sites. Its major towns are commercial and administrative by nature. The Pilbara region, on the other hand, has seen a rapid influx of population since the 1960s to service a rapidly growing mining industry. Thus, in addition to established administrative and agricultrual townships, the Pilbara has been characterized by mushrooming new ports and mining towns. By contrast, the Eastern Goldfields, with its nickel and gold mining industry, is suffering serious depletion of population, with only the few older established administrative towns maintaining their population.

Thus, for the purposes of this report, it is appropriate to distinguish three categories of inhabitants of these sparsely populated areas, namely:

- Isolated families on stations and farms, or on settlements such as construction camps or fishing bases.
- Residents of towns and settlements.
- Minority ethnic communities.

For families in the first category, isolation is a pervasive feature of life. The following quote from a talk by a parent in this situation (Walsh, 1977, p.133-134) illustrates this point.

'Our property is 800 kilometres from Perth, 290 kilometres from Meekatharra, 144 kilometres from the nearest town (if you could call it that), and 64 kilometres from the nearest neighbour. We have no television and no telephone. On the Meekatharra radio network ... most homesteads are at least 60 kilometres apart, and the distance from Meekatharra range up to 800 kilometres. Some children are as far again from Meekatharra as they are from Perth. Of course, being 60 kilometres from your nearest neighbour does not mean that you are 60 kilometres from a child of your own age or sex. In some instances, though very few, there is more than one family with children of comparable ages living on the same station. Our children are very lucky in this respect. On "Mileura", our home, there are nine children under nine. During the school holidays there are at least fourteen, often more, under twelve. About half are Aboriginal and they all play together. It is marvellous that there are so many, but it is the exception rather than rule in our part of the world. More often, children have to rely on their brothers and sisters for company, and large families seem to be decreasing as

fast as boarding fees (for private schools in Perth) go up. You would, of course, realize that when contending with distances of this nature, week-end social activities are rare, so even other adults are seldom seen on regular basis'.

As this passage indicates, outside the towns, families tend to be separated by large tracts of arid, uninviting country, divided into pastoral properties which provide an often less than secure living. Isolation from other families, from towns and from most services is a fact of life for these people. Moreover, despite the uncertainty of commodity prices, poor seasons, and a gradual decline in the non-town rural population, this isolated life-style is expected to continue in Western Australia. Thus, educational provision for isolated children, either in small groups or individually, is of paramount interest and concern to educators.

Not surprisingly, the mere fact of the huge distances separating these people produces many problems which must be considered and overcome by educators. Factors such as the disproportionate cost of providing educational facilities and the difficulty of staffing are important. Similarly, the life-styles and experiences of these children create difficulties of relevancy of educational material.

On the other hand, inhabitants of the few towns and ports in this isolated area face problems of a different nature. To understand these problems it is important to recognize the nature of urbanization and centralization which has occurred in Western Australia. Perth, the capital of Western Australia, has grown from a town of 73 000 with 40 per cent of the State's population in 1901, to a city of 805 000 containing 70 per cent of the population in 1976. By contrast, only five towns outside the Perth statistical division have more than 10 000 residents.

Perhaps the most significant characteristics of these towns is their oasis-like quality, isolated by great distances and rugged terrain and surrounded by an inhospitable and often harsh environment. This characteristic again creates problems of isolation since most commodities and services are administered and supplied by centralized bodies based in Perth.

It might be expected that a strong sense of community would exist within such towns. However, according to some writers some towns in these areas, (Clayton 1974, Huelin 1973) particularly the new mining towns, have not yet established this feeling of community, but tend to be temporary aggregations of people attracted by the availability of work and competitive salaries. Not only is this lack of community-sense a problem for educators, but the series if inter-related factors thought to account for the absence of community themselves present major problems.

Amongst these factors, impermanence of residence is the most dramatic characteristic in the new mining towns of the Pilbara. The turnover rate has been known to be as high as 400 per cent annually during initial town construction, and falling to 100 per cent after mines were in full production. In older towns, which act mainly as regional administrative and commercial centres, permanent residents tend to be station people or owners of small businesses and impermanence is not such a problem.

However, most residents of mining towns have left the city to work, away from their homes, friends and sometimes families, for a finite period, usually two to three years. Loneliness and absence of enduring relationships are characteristic (Brealey 1978, p.5). Families tend to be truly nuclear, isolated from grandparents and other relatives (Clayton 1974, p.5).

Occupational opportunities for women are narrow and the lack of cultural and intellectual stimulation tends to result in boredom and frustration. Under these conditions it is difficult for young people to have a meaningful role in the community (Austin, 1976). Social tensions may develop due to the high proportion of unmarried males in some towns. Additionally, in some mining towns owned by companies, the company hierarchy permeates the whole social structure. On-the-job status, role relationships, and work tensions transfer to all areas of personal, family and community life. Thus, although stability and community balance is developing, it is within an environment with these characteristics that both administration and teaching practice operate.

Not only are these problems ones of student instability and maladjustment. Problems arise because transients comprise not only manual workers employed on a seasonal basis but Government employees, including educators themselves.

In addition to these factors, a new dimension is added to all these problems as the nature of the communities change. For instance, many small towns, relying on gold mining or commerce which is no longer viable, are in danger of extinction, and facilities are poor. It is indicative of this problem that the central region has suffered an annual loss of population of almost five per cent, leaving an area the size of France with a population of 3 500 in 1976. Thus, whereas since 1969 the Kimberley region has experienced a doubling of school enrolments and the Pilbara has had a tripled school enrolment, schools in the Eastern Goldfields have closed. Naturally the social problems themselves change. For instance, in the Pilbara region, as mining towns become established, problems such as high mobility may reduce. All of these developments necessitate changes in provision of services in these towns.

The problems of providing educational services in sparsely populated areas in Western Australia are complicated by the high degree of cultural heterogeneity of the regions. For instance, in many of these isolated areas, residents are new to Australia with countries of origin as diverse as Italy, Greece, United Kingdom and the Middle East. In other areas, the most significant educational implications lie in the distinction between Aboriginal and European life-styles and cultures.

The Aboriginal population in sparsely populated areas is large - for instance, in the Pilbara region, approximately 12 per cent of the population is Aboriginal, and in the Kimberley region, 60 per cent of the population is Aboriginal. Many of the Aborigines in these areas live in tribal communities.

To a large extent serious disintegration of tribalism and many aspects of traditional Aboriginal culture has accompanied the settlement and industrialization of Australia by whites. The result has been to create two groups of Aborigines - the urban dwelling group who retain few links with Aboriginal traditions and follow, to varying degrees, European practices and life-styles; and the 'outback' group who are influenced to some extent by European ways, but retain strong tribal-traditional identities. It is the 'outback' Aborigines who are in the majority in sparsely populated areas.

Many Aborigines live on the fringe of white settlement, many in semi-desert, and many live and work on stations. Thus the educational provisions that are adequate for most white Australians are less appropriate for Aboriginal students. As Fitzgerald, (1976, p.192) a Commissioner in the Inquiry into Poverty, notes, there are certain conditions that contribute to this situation:

'One of the most obvious factors in limiting the use of educational services by Aborigines is their extreme poverty. Aborigines constitute the poorest identifiable group in the community and are held in low esteem by the major society, not only because of their poverty but also because of their cultural differences and powerlessness.'

Fitzgerald also points out that ill health, poor housing conditions, and low teacher expectations are amongst factors endemic to the Aboriginal situation and which complicate the provision of education.

Another factor which must be taken into account in Aboriginal education is the basic conflict between the value system of white Australian culture and traditional Aboriginal culture. Fitzgerald (1976, p.199) summarises this conflict:

'The school, reflecting values of the white middle class society, places strong emphasis on personal excellence, competition, individual striving and working by the clock; special praise is given to those students who learn quickly and show a readiness to question and test information. But these qualities are not rated highly in traditional Aboriginal communities; they prize co-operation and mutual support; putting one's head above the crowd is frowned upon; the clock does not exist and there are no advantages in speed; the learning handed down is accepted without question as the continued wisdom of generations of ancestors.'

Among the results of the absence of emphasis on personal achievement are little pressure on young people at school, lack of rewards for academic success, and student absenteeism.

In addition to these problems, there are many others facing Aborigines For instance, for those isolated Aborigines who live away from towns, English is very much a second language. Similarly, student absenteeism in these areas is brought about by the nomadic life-style of these people. For the less-isolated children who attend town schools, problems arise from breakdown of their families due to poverty, unemployment and alcoholism.

It is within this complex context that the Education Department has formulated its policies and practices in Aboriginal education.

Although they are by no means the only ones, the problems outlined here, those of isolation, community atmosphere and cultural heterogeneity, are the major ones facing educators of people in sparsely populated areas.

3. GENERAL EDUCATIONAL PROVISION IN SPARSELY POPULATED AREAS

What follows is a general description of the educational provision in Western Australia, with emphasis on those aspects of schooling and support services particularly relevant to sparsely populated areas.

3.1 Overview of Organization of Education in Sparsely Populated Areas

The legal responsibility for education of children in Western Australia is held by the State Government, although funds are allocated from both the State and Commonwealth budgets. Eighty percent of the State's 260 000 school children attend Government schools, staffed and administered by the Education Department of Western Australia. The other twenty per cent of children attend non-Government schools which are mostly denominational, fee-charging institutions. These non-Government schools are staffed and administered independently of the Government school system, although Government funding is substantial.

In sparsely populated areas, most educational services are provided by the Education Department, although there are a small number of Catholic parish schools. Thus, the emphasis in this report is on the structure and operation of the Education Department of Western Australia, with contributions of other agencies being described where relevant.

Most senior officers of the Department have had extensive experience as teachers and administrators in the school system. The Department's senior administrators and various professional and clerical support services are located in Perth, so the Perth Head Office continues to exercise control over many aspects of the Government school system. However, the Education Department has established regional offices which increasingly provide advisory and administrative staff to each region.

Depending on their size, regional offices are headed by a regional director, or superintendent, with one or more superintendents with responsibilities for either primary or secondary schools. Each office has an education officer appointed to assist in the administration of the region. Advisory staff are appointed to provide teachers with support in specific subject areas. Although the Kimberley and Pilbara regions do not have psychological guidance staff as do the other regions, each has an advisory teacher with responsibility for special education.

Support staff numbers are related to the numbers of schools and students in a region. The Kimberley region has two advisory teachers and the Pilbara five, while the Goldfields has four (plus two guidance staff) and Geraldton has seven (plus one guidance officer).

It is usual for advisory staff to visit all the schools in their region at least once each year. However, climatic conditions, roads and distances in the north of the State are such that itineraries are less flexible than might be desired. It is often necessary, for example, for advisory staff to travel together and to initiate visits rather than to respond to requests.

3.2 Distribution of Schools

The school structure in Western Australia provides four levels of education - pre-primary, primary (Years 1 to 7), secondary (Years 8 to 12) and post-secondary. Children are eligible to attend a pre-primary school from February of the year in which they turn five. However, attendance is only compulsory from the beginning of the year in which a child turns six to the end of the year he turns fifteen. Thus every child in the State must attend school for at least ten years, although in practice, a small number of exemptions from attendance are given in special circumstances. After compulsory schooling, somewhat more than half of the students in Year 10 continue into upper secondary school.

Table 3.1 indicates the distribution of teachers and students in pre-school, primary and secondary schools throughout the sparsely populated areas. In terms of the picture painted by this table of educational provision for sparsely populated areas, there are several points to note.

Firstly, the low rate of secondary enrolment reflects the fact that many older students from isolated areas attend schools in more populous areas, away from their homes. Especially in the Kimberley region, availability of education beyond Year 10 is limited. Similarly, although the proportion of school leavers after the compulsory school age is about 48 per cent in Government schools, it is generally lower in the city than in rural districts.

A second noteworthy point is that the distribution of schools is by no means uniform throughout these regions. For instance, in the Geraldton region, the seven largest primary schools which account for half the Government primary school enrolments are located in the region's three major towns. The region's three senior high schools are also situated in these towns and five of the six district high schools are located in larger farming towns. By contrast, the very sparsely populated central expanse of the region has a single district high school, with no other secondary school within 400 km. Similarly the non-Government commitment in these regions is not uniform. The Geraldton region, for instance, has 15 per cent of primary students and 25 per cent of secondary students attending Catholic schools. This represents a considerably higher non-Government commitment than in the Pilbara or Goldfields regions, though lower than in the Kimberleys, where mission schools continue to be important.

TABLE 3.1: PROVISION OF SCHOOLS IN SPARSELY POPULATED REGIONS

School Category and Description	Number of Schools in Sparsely Populated Areas	STUDENT ENROLMENT			TEACHERS			Total Number of Schools, Statewide
		Pre-School	Years 1-7	Years 8-12	Pre-Primary	Years 1-7	Years 8-12	
Pre-School Centre	60	2725	-	-	50	-	-	311
Primary Class IA (more than 500 pupils)	9	431	5423	-	9	219	-	77
Primary Class I (300 - 500 pupils)	18	637	6367	-	14	275	-	154
Primary Class II (100 - 300 pupils)	17	357	2289	20	9	109	1	83
Primary Class III (26 - 99 pupils)	52	406	2397	20	10	122	-	123
Primary Class IV (less than 25 pupils)	15	66	280	18	1	20	-	47
District High Class I (Pre-school to Year 10 more than 300 pupils)	6	93	1724	794	3	70	108	23
District High Class II (Pre-school to Year 10 less than 300 pupils)	9	194	1614	489	4	77	54	29
High (Year 8 to Year 10)	2	-	-	763	-	-	55	12
Senior High (Year 8 to Year 12)	8	-	-	5150	-	-	291	62
Non Government	33	139	3125	1539	5	70	36	
TOTALS		5225	24691	8930	105	1044	548	

There are also interesting differences between provision of schools in sparsely populated areas and elsewhere in the State. For instance, schools are divided into categories, based on student enrolment and level of study. Most of the smaller class III and IV primary schools are located in rural areas. Similarly, joint primary and secondary schools, known as district high schools, are provided where it is economically unfeasible to locate secondary schools but where a demand nevertheless exists. District high schools take students from pre-primary level to Year 10.

Similarly, high schools are typically located in areas of substantial population growth and develop into senior high schools within a few years of establishment.

These points illustrate that there are significant difference between populous and sparsely populated areas in terms of provision of schools. Moreover, these differences reflect the flexibility in the Education Department which ensures that the characteristic needs of students in sparsely populated areas can be met.

3.3 School Staffing

Less than 20per cent of trainee teachers have their homes outside the metropolitan areas, thus making the pool of permanent teachers in sparsely populated areas very small. However, when teachers join the Department they undertake to serve anywhere in the State. It is not unusual for recent graduates to receive rural appointments of two to three years duration.

Nevertheless, on average, teachers in rural areas are less experienced and remain for a shorter time in each school that their metropolitan counterparts, and teachers in many sparsely populated areas do not see themselves as permanent members of the local community. Incentives are offered to increase the stability and quality of the rural teaching force. The promotional system within the Education Department tends to be used in this matter, since generally the promotional ladder leads from small rural schools to larger metropolitan schools. Although country service is not a requisite for promotion, it is a *de facto* feature of advancement. So, even though the most senior and qualified staff tend to apply for metropolitan posts, remote schools are likely to get senior staff who are adequately qualified, and often eager to excel in their professions as they move from one promotional position to the next.

In addition, although the process of staffing is complex and time consuming, the school system is small enough to permit many informal decisions about individual appointees and particular schools.

Additionally, certain financial incentives exist for teachers in rural schools, which are intended as compensation for inhospitable climate, isolation and lack of cultural and social opportunities. Teachers receive district allowances, ranging from $193 to $2 200 per year, determined by location and marital status. Also, transport and accommodation subsidies are provided and the Department assumes responsibility in ascertaining that suitable accommodation is available before appointing teachers to rural schools.

3.4 Professional Development of Teachers

Teachers in sparsely populated areas have access to numerous teacher-development courses. However, there are many problems to overcome. Distances between schools and the conditions of the roads in most sparsely populated areas constrain opportunities for certain types of professional development. It is not feasible, except in towns where there are two or more schools, for teachers to meet colleagues from other schools for short workshops or seminars. Travelling time virtually demands longer courses, which are undoubtedly of professional value, but which highlight other difficulties for teacher development in sparsely populated areas.

These difficulties include the high accommodation costs for teachers attending courses, the scarcity of replacement teachers in small centres, and the expense of transport for course participants and organizers. In many instances, major costs are associated with the replacement of teachers involved in in-service activities. Formally organized professional development is thus more expensive and more inconvenient to participants in sparsely populated areas then elsewhere.

However, the Education Department operates a programme through its Teacher Development Branch and this is complemented by a joint Government, non-Government schools programme funded by the Federal Schools Commission. Departmental funds also are made available to regional superintendents for allocation to schools proposing to conduct school-based in-service courses.

3.5 School Resources and Facilities

Most funds for school buildings and facilities are allocated according to priorities determined within the Department's head office. Once these priorities are determined, equivalent distribution of buildings and facilities to all schools is the characteristic.

For instance, Departmental policy continues to emphasize that all communities, irrespective of affluence or distance from Perth, should have comparable standards of buildings. In practice, this necessitates discrimination in favour of remote, small communities, since building costs in such centres may be more than three times the metropolitan equivalent. Similarly, school designs appropriate to the hot climate of some regions have resulted in features, such as insulation, reduced window space and air-conditioning, which are not included elsewhere.

Although control of capital works is centralized, schools have responsibility for commissioning and paying for minor works such as repairs and additions. This enables some extra flexibility to meet special needs of individual schools.

3.6 Curriculum

The Education Department's Curriculum Branch, located in Perth, produces various curriculum documents for primary and lower secondary schools. Guidelines in most subject areas are supplied, and are complemented by topic booklets and other resource materials. Committees of teachers and curriculum specialists, usually chaired by subject superintendents, guide the preparation of these materials. Although these documents are not prescriptive, most schools use them as a basis for their learning programme. Most materials are offered free to both Government and non-Government schools and are supplemented by materials purchased by the schools.

In terms of provision of curriculum material for sparsely populated areas, there is a major concern with respect to the relevance of school learning programmes to the experience and needs of students. That experience and needs of students in sparsely populated areas are highly characteristic is a well-recognized and highly relevant factor in curriculum planning in Western Australia.

To illustrate this point, an Education Department Report on education in the Kimberleys noted (Byrne et al 1977, p.39) that syllabus statements and their related resources used in schools in the Kimberleys tend to reflect the European-based culture of the southern portion of the State and are not wholly suited to either Aboriginal or European students in the region. It goes on to propose that there are shortcomings in language teaching associated with inadequate resources and the shortage of specially trained teachers. The report also points to the paucity of enrichment in school work available to European students, most of whom will ultimately leave the region for employment or further study.

Other later reports keep this issue alive. Fitzgerald's 'Poverty and Education in Australia' (1976), the report of the National Conference on Country Education (1977) and the Schools Commission report for the 1977-79 Rolling Triennium (1976) all express doubts about the adequacy of curricula in some rural schools in Australia. It is suggested that factors such as the physical and social environments of the rural schools, combined with relatively high turnover of staff, teacher inexperience, resource shortages and isolation contribute to unsatisfactory curriculum adaptation and implementation.

A number of strategies have been employed with a view to providing a curriculum more responsive to the needs of rural children. For instance, syllabi have been superseded by guidelines in most subject areas. Complementing these guidelines are topic booklets and other resource materials prepared by Curriculum Branch. Similarly, since committees of teachers and curriculum specialists guide the preparation of these materials, individual schools play a larger part in curriculum decision making. In addition, relevance is assured because of the substantial responsibility for approving and moderating learning programmes which resides with regional superintendents, in consultation with school principals.

Various programmes, initiated or endorsed by the Education Department, encourage school staffs to participate in curriculum review and improvement. In-service programmes to assist schools in collective needs assessment, curriculum development, examination of organizational climates, and school-based evaluation procedures now complement the customary courses in particular subject areas. As well as these centrally directed programmes, advisory teachers stationed in regional offices help individual schools and teachers to make the available curriculum resources relevant to local circumstances.

Funds to stimulate curriculum innovation are obtainable from a number of sources. The Education Department awards grants which average $500 to assist individual schools to undertake school-based curriculum development. Priority is given to projects which involve the whole staff of a school in curriculum decision making. The Education Department also gives regional superintendents funds to disburse to local schools for similar purposes.

At the Federal level, there are additional funds made available to allow development of individual teacher-based projects. For example, sixteen grants have been made to schools in sparsely populated areas in the last three years under the Special Projects (Innovations) Programme. These projects have emphasised language and the practical and creative arts, the funds being used to purchase equipment and materials to improve these facets of the curriculum. Some schools have bought buses as part of their innovative projects, arguing that a major need in sparsely populated areas is to overcome isolation.

In addition, Federal funds are allocated to Western Australia through the Disadvantaged Country Areas component of the Disadvantaged Schools Program. Under this scheme, Government and non-Government schools have benefited from the infusion of additional materials and personnel, and the implementation of new approaches to curriculum that the programme made possible. (See p.28)

It appears that schools differ widely in the extent to which they have adapted their learning programmes to local conditions and to their particular student populations. The success of these school-based programmes has yet to be determined.

3.7 Academic Achievement

The major responsibility for maintaining standards of achievement in the schools rests with the regional and subject superintendents, in consultation with school principals. These superintendents have substantial responsibility for approving and moderating learning programmes. In addition, at the lower secondary school level, the Board of Secondary Education, an autonomous body responsible to the Minister, has considerable influence over courses, although subject superintendents help define practices within their subject areas.

Documented evidence about standards of achievement in the schools in sparsely populated areas is scarce and does not generally distinguish between the various non-metropolitan areas. However, information from the Board of Secondary Education shows the distribution of different levels of awards in each subject for each secondary school in the State at the end of 1975. This data suggests that levels of performance of secondary students attending rural schools are generally lower than those of students attending city schools, although there is no evidence of differences between students in sparsely populated areas.

Similarly, indications of academic achievement, such as test scores, examination results, awards of certificates, awards of scholarships and retention rates beyond compulsory schooling, consistently suggest that Australian students in rural areas do less well than students in the city areas. (Weston, 1977, Angus, 1976, Keeves and Bourke, 1976, Fyfield, 1970).

Numerous factors have been proposed to account for the lower educational achievement of rural students. For instance, Weston (1977) categorized the factors as those relating to educational facilities, distance, community structure and cultural background. Thus, in the Kimberleys, the contrasting backgrounds of whites and Aborigines are perceived to contribute to lower standards of school achievement than are extant for city students. The report on education in the Kimberleys region summarises the perceptions of teachers and European parents about the influence of the two cultures on school standards. It states (1975, p.39):

'Teachers, in general, indicate that Aborigines are either unable to achieve at median levels or lack the motivation to achieve, or both. In such subjects as mathematics. language, social studies and science, the standards for Aborigines tended to be one to two years behind their European fellow-students'.

The report suggests that low teacher expectations and the Aborigine's lack of exposure to a wide range of 'normal white' experiences are major factors associated with this situation.

In addition, the view of European parents about educational provisions in the Kimberleys tend to be critical, according to the report. Serious misgivings about standards were expressed to the writers of the report, who provided the following summary (1975, p.40):

'Local European parents and community-interest groups indicated some dissatisfaction about the standards either possible for, or being achievedby, European children. It was pointed out that European parents tended to send their children south to school in order to obtain the quality of education not presently available in the Kimberleys. It was also stated that the schools geared their standards and presentation to the levels required for Aborigines and that this tendency seriously disadvantaged the European child, who readily and effortlessly achieved the desired class level with a consequent fall offin motivation: A further complaint related to the "cultural" deprivation of the region. Schools as well as communities were not able, it is claimed, to provide the enriched social life and to extend the availability of media-based interests normally available in Perth'.

On the other hand, in the mining towns of the Pilbara, most parents are satisfied with the overall quality of education. Nevertheless, the already mentioned characteristics of these towns leads to certain problems in maintaining levels of academic achievement comparable with urban schools.

The limited objective evidence relating to academic standards in this State's sparsely populated areas suggests that there are rural-metropolitan differences. However, the relationships between the factors which might account for the inequality of rural-metropolitan educational outcomes are by no means clear.

3.8 Conclusion

The educational provisions described in this Chapter illustrate the commitment of educators in Western Australia to the ideals of flexibility and equality in education. It is through these commitments that the diverse needs of various groups, such as people in sparsely populated areas, can be met.

However, in addition to features outlined in this chapter, there are many features of the educational provision in Western Australia which are specific to the special needs of inhabitants of sparsely populated regions. These features are discussed in the next chapter.

4. SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL PROVISIONS IN SPARSELY POPULATED AREAS

Although a majority of students in sparsely populated areas live in towns and attend schools similar to those elsewhere in the State, a significant proportion of school-aged children live in such remote or characteristic circumstances that special educational provision is required for them. The nature of this provision is the focus of this chapter.

4.1 Provision for Students Without Ready Access to Schools

A significant proportion of school-aged children live large distances from schools. These children are so widely spread that it is not feasible to provide schools near them. To meet the needs of these children, a number of strategies have been developed. These strategies are discussed below.

4.1.1 School Transport Services

If there are eleven or more children living beyond a radius of 4.5 kilometres from the school, a school bus may be used. During 1976, in Western Australia, 700 school buses conveyed 23 000 children more than 80 000 kilometres daily. The service is fully subsidized by the Education Department and hence there is no fee for travel on the bus.

Parents of children who require transport submit to the Education Department a statement outlining their requirements. The application is submitted through a local school bus advisory committee which contains parent, local government and school staff membership. It is usually the principal of the school who administers the school bus service and is responsible for discipline on the buses.

A number of factors are taken into account when establishing a bus route. These include: length of the route, the number of children under nine years of age, total number of children to be carried on the bus, condition of the road, and the impact of the new service on existing bus services. For instance, rather than stipulate a maximum length of a bus route in terms of distance travelled, the Education Department has in effect advised schools and bus contractors that no child should spend more than three hours on a bus each day. Nevertheless, there are instances of longer services operating, with some straight runs with secondary school children of up to 130 kilometres. These longer services are usually a result of approaches from parents who prefer their children travel the longer distance rather than arrange boarding away from home, or correspondence education.

School bus routes may be altered when extra children arrive in a district, or when children leave the school. Deviations may be granted when children live more than 2.5 kilometres from an existing bus service. However, the interests of individual children and the cost involved in providing an additional service must be carefully weighed against the consequences of increased travelling time for the bus users.

In addition to these bus services, the Education Department provides conveyance allowance to parents who must use private means to convey their children to and from school or to the existing bus route.

4.1.2 Facilities for Boarding Away from Home

Due to the lack of secondary schools in sparsely populated areas, some children board away from home during the school term. In addition to independent boarding schools, most of which are in Perth, students can stay in hostels organized by the Education Department.

As Figure 2 shows, in 1976 there were 16 hostels, two established in Perth and the others in country towns. All but two are controlled by the Country High Schools Hostel Authority. They are run by local committees which, as a result of Authority policy, enjoy a high degree of autonomy in staff recruitment, salaries and conditions. Nevertheless, parents and the committee can approach the Authority with their problems. A warden or supervisor directs activities of ancilliary staff and administers the hostel and provides for the welfare of students.

Most hostels are co-educational, with girls and boys able to mix socially and in recreational activities. Hostels generally have facilities for sports and hobbies and organize programmes of socials, dances and outings. Students are supervised for study on most evenings and it is not unusual for teachers from the local high school to undertake the supervision.

Hostel fees vary from $975 to $1 395 per year and are subject to revision by the Education Department. The Federal Government offers assistance to parents of children who do not have reasonable access to a Government school which provides suitable courses. This assistance takes the form of a boarding allowance of up to $500 per child annually, free of means test, supplemented by additional allowances of up to $450 inversely related to the parents' incomes. Special grants of up to $550 may be made in cases of extreme economic hardship. In addition, the State Government offers parents a further $150 per child annually.

Recently there has been a trend towards decreased hostel enrolments. At present, a little less than 80 percent of the 1 400 hostel places have been filled. Apart from the decline in some rural incomes since the early 1970s and continued increase of hostel fees, a number of factors help account for this drop in hostel enrolments.

These include:

(a) Improved school bus services.

(b) The preference of some parents to supervise their children at home. This option may have become more attractive to parents or senior students since the establishment of an Isolated Students Matriculation Scheme (see p.22).

(c) The decision by some older students to work on their parent's farming properties at a time when labour is relatively expensive.

(d) The construction of new high schools in towns in the Pilbara and the Goldfields.

4.2 Educational Provision for Children Without Access to Schools

Although parents who live beyond the range of school bus services may decide to send their children away to school, few do so until the children are old enough to attend a secondary school. The majority of isolated children study at home until they have finished the equivalent of Year 7, and even subsequent to this, many undertake secondary studies at home. The Western Australian Correspondence School provides courses from Years 1 to 10 for students who do not have access to schools, while the Isolated Students Matriculation Scheme gives tutorial and material support to isolated students undertaking Year 11 and 12 courses. In addition, five schools of the air enable two-way radio communication between teachers and isolated students to complement the correspondence courses. These three programmes are outlined briefly in this section.

4.2.1 Western Australian Correspondence School

The Western Australian Correspondence School was founded in 1918, when the first group of 'outback' children began to receive correspondence lessons. Enrolments rose from less than 100 in the foundation year to a peak of 2,162 in 1933. Subsequently, enrolments fell steadily due to the consolidation of schools, improved transport services, and more generous Government financial assistance for parents who sent their children away to school. The last two decades have brought a levelling out of enrolments, annual numbers being between 400 and 600 primary students and approximately 100 secondary students. The distribution of students throughout the State is shown in Figure 2.

The Western Australian Correspondence School primary courses include reading, spelling, English, writing, mathematics, social studies, art and religious studies. Secondary school courses, all approved by the Board

of Secondary Education, are English, mathematics, social studies and science (the core subjects) and art, health education, bookkeeping and commerce.

Lesson sheets and other printed material are divided into 20 sets of work, which students are required to complete and forward for marking every two weeks. These lesson sheets incorporate suggestions from parents and teachers. Most textbooks are written by staff of the Education Department's Curriculum Branch and are issued free to students. In addition to written materials, students now work with audio cassettes, slides and filmstrips and video equipment, enabling the development of a greater range of skills.

Supervision of students' work is an important element of correspondence education. One in six isolated families employs a governess for this purpose although financial constraints typically prevent parents from employing supervisory help. Thus, most correspondence students are supervised by their mothers. Some parents find supervision of correspondence lessons quite demanding due to lack of teacher training, other work pressures and the emotional bonds between parent and child (McAtee and Zani 1975).

Prompt feedback of marked lessons to students from the Correspondence School is an essential part of the learning process, but one which is fraught with difficulties. Dependence on regular, rapid mail deliveries makes the arrangement susceptible to unexpected disruptions. For instance, some mail is lost in transit, necessitating duplication of work. In some parts of the Kimberleys and Pilbara, there are no mail services at all and residents receive mail only when they travel to the nearest town, which may be 300 kilometres away.

Western Australian Correspondence School staff are selected on the basis of their interest in correspondence education and their ability to relate to isolated children in a correspondence-teaching programme. Appointments are for relatively short terms (up to two years) to ensure that staff have had recent, relevant classroom experience. Many of the 54 professional staff are engaged in course revision and development, with particular emphasis on the preparation of useful, attractive materials.

Correspondence tuition has a necessary and continuing role in Western Australian education. While it is unlikely that significant growth will occur in this State's isolated rural population in the forseeable future, it is equally improbable that the scattered pastoralists, miners, roadworkers, and hunters who comprise the Correspondence School's clientele will decline greatly in number.

4.2.2 The Schools of the Air

Schools of the Air are small units, located in regional towns. They are classed as primary schools and are staffed by one or two teachers. They provide direct communication, through a two-way radio system, between 55 per cent of families with children on correspondence courses and their correspondence school teacher. Their location is indicated on Figure 2.

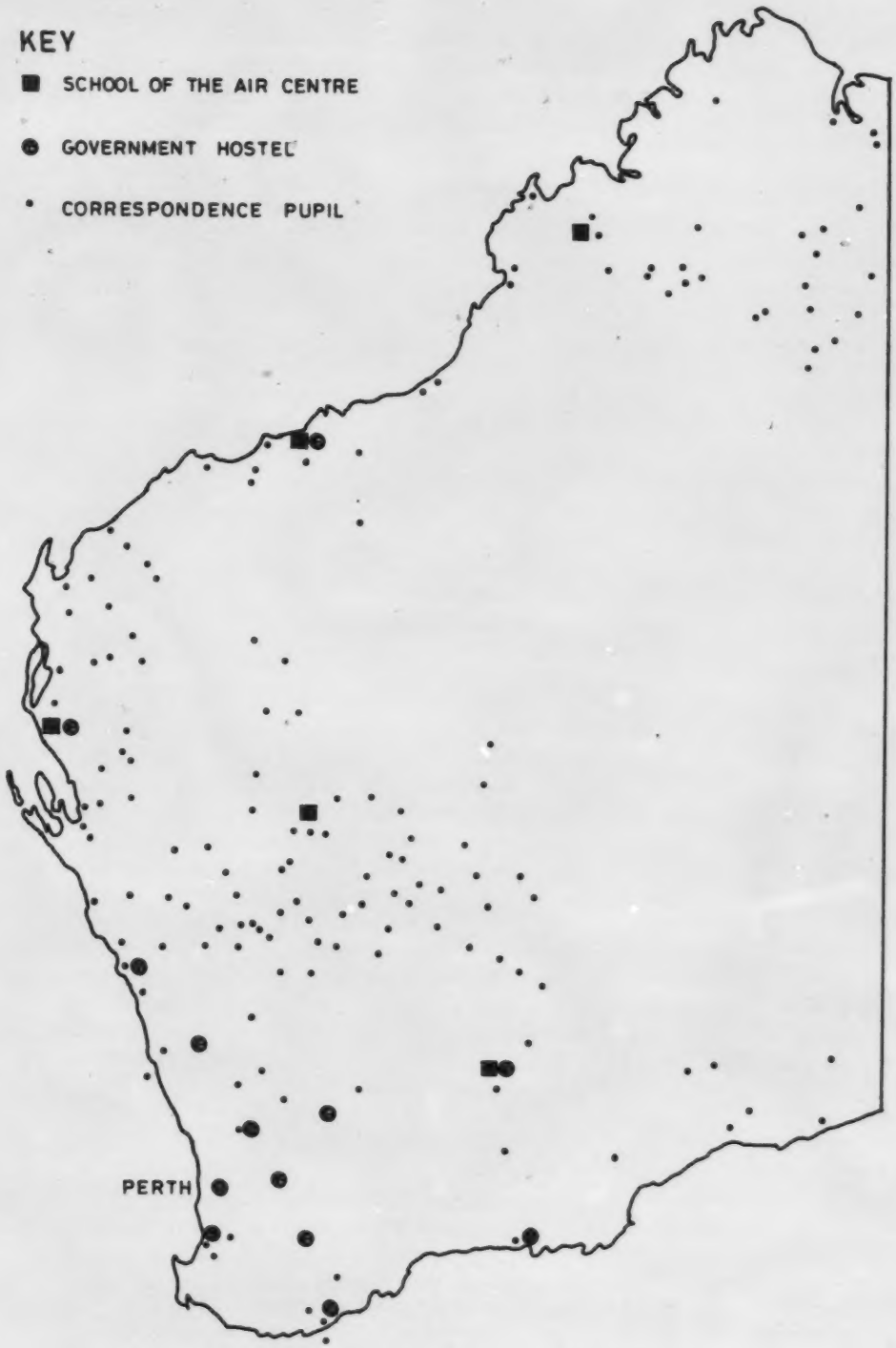

FIGURE 2: Western Australia, Showing Position of Hostels, Schools of the Air and Correspondence School Pupils

The main functions of the Schools of the Air are to develop and supplement the correspondence courses in each subject area and to provide experiences in areas not catered for by the established courses. In addition, assistance is given to supervisors in such aspects of their task as teaching techniques, daily lesson plans and assignment completion.

Only primary students may enrol with these schools. Groups of 5 to 10 pupils from each Year level have a half-hour lesson each day during which time they may listen and talk to their teacher and to each other. This enables more rapid feedback than the mail system and children gain a group identity. In addition, parents queries, oral reports and examination of selected students may occur.

There are many schemes aimed at extending the quality of service provided by the School of the Air. For instance, to assist families with the financial burden of providing transmitters, cheaper sets licenced only for School of the Air are available. Alternatively, families may apply to join a transceiver leasing scheme.

Another useful adjunct to the School of the Air is an itinerant teacher. This teacher, by visits to isolated children and their families, can provide on-the-spot assistance to pupils which supplements both Correspondence School mail and School of the Air broadcasts.

Additionally, the principals or teachers-in-charge of the Schools of the Air have been given in-service experience in the use of audio-visual aids and tape-recorded materials with the correspondence sets so that, in turn, parents could be helped to gain experience in the use of such aids. In addition, to encourage promotionally oriented teachers to apply for the positions of teacher-in-charge, the status of the schools has recently been upgraded.

In addition to School of the Air broadcasts, many isolated children listen to the Correspondence Schools of the Air and other school programmes, which are broadcasted by the Australian Broadcasting Commission. Although reception problems are encountered in some areas and a few families do not have radios, a wide coverage of the State has been achieved with these programmes.

4.2.3 Isolated Students Matriculation Scheme (ISMS)

While the correspondence school provides education for Years 1 to 10, the ISMS gives tutorial and material support to isolated students taking Years 11 and 12. In 1979, 111 students are enrolled in the ISMS. Courses in English, history, human biology, biology, mathematics, technical drawing and art have been prepared, while development of other courses is continuing. All are recognized Tertiary Admission Examination subjects and are comparable with Statewide syllabi prescribed for these courses.

Learning materials produced through the Isolated Students' Matriculation Scheme include audio-visual aids, such as cassettes and filmstrips, as well as written notes and tests. Each student received on loan a cassette recorder-player and a slide and filmstrip viewer. However, the written medium continues to be extremely important to isolated students.

There are 12 tutors presently on the staff of the Isolated Students' Matriculation Scheme. Each is a senior teacher responsible for providing learning support for as many as 35 students. Contact is usually by mail and, to lesser extent, by telephone as tutors are based in the Isolated Students' Matriculation Scheme's Perth office. However, additional opportunities for contact have been provided through camps for students, which are held in Perth twice annually, and through the appointment of regional tutors, who visit students in their homes and provide a source of advice about careers, courses and study. The appointment of regional tutors ensures that each student can turn to someone for guidance on matters other than those related to subjects.

In addition to these facilities, a large proportion of students have access to a district high school, with its library and study facilities. Many staff members in these schools provide valuable assistance to the scheme's students.

More than 80 per cent of Isolated Students' Matriculation Scheme students are female. Various factors may contribute to this situation. Parents may still be more inclined to send their sons than their daughters away to boarding school. Girls may be more likely than boys to remain at home beyond the school leaving age, despite poor employment prospects. Girls who leave school early may be more attracted than boys to subsequent study.

At the time of writing, two groups of students have completed Years 11 and 12 and have taken the Tertiary Admissions Examinations. The overall performance of these groups has been highly satisfactory. For example, in 1978, of the 25 students who took the TAE, at least 7 students were accepted into tertiary institutions, one student was equal 7th in the State history examination, and another equal 9th in the State art examination.

4.3 Educational Provision for Children with Special Characteristics

4.3.1 Exceptional Children

For educators of children in small remote schools, the problem of diagnosis and remediation of learning difficulties is an acute one. It has been the pattern that children in small country communities and in remote areas who suffer from some form of physical or educational handicap, travel considerable distances, in many cases, in order to receive specialized diagnosis and educational assistance. Because the diagnosis and development of individualized remediation programmes is complex and time-consuming, parents have been required to board in Perth, sometimes for extended periods of time. Apart from the costs of

boarding away from home, which for many parents may be prohibitive, there are also problems of separation of young children from parents. In order to help meet these needs of children and parents in isolated areas, the Chidley Centre in Perth has been developed.

The purpose of the Centre is to remediate learning difficulties of country children who would otherwise not have access to special educational facilites. Although children from anywhere outside the metropolitan area are eligible for admission, priority is given to the isolated child from a station or road-construction camp who has no access to remedial help.

Children from small country schools with mixed grades, who are seen briefly and infrequently by guidance officers, are selected next for admission. Third on the list comes the child from a larger school where the principal, teachers and guidance officer consider that more detailed assessment and small group participation might be necessary to supplement their own efforts. Finally,students who are particularly resistant to assistance within their schools are admitted.

The Chidley Point Centre is located in Perth, in close proximity to major medical, psychological and educational services. It provides residential remedial and general educational facilities for a maximum of 40 students at a time. Since the involvement of parents is an important function of the centre, parents are encouraged to stay at some point during the child's visit. Twelve parents can be accommodated at a time. Usually four or five parents are present in any week, with the result that approximately 70 per cent of children have their parents present at some stage.

In all, the centre is staffed by 34 people. The professional staff consists of a principal, a psychologist and seven teachers, one of whom is a physical education specialist. All have had training in special education. The large support staff manages the centre and some of them have had experience in foster-parent situations. In addition, four teachers' college students have supervisory duties in return for accommodation.

Staff members each take one or two children as their special charges. In this way, each child has a "guardian" in the centre, who acts to some degree as a surrogate parent. The guardian writes to parents to reassure them and keeps contact with children for a time after they leave the centre.

Once a child has been at Chidley for two or three weeks he follows a programme which, though individualized, contains five basic steps: assessment and diagnosis, programme development, implementation of learning strategies, transistion before departure, and follow-up. The delay prior to the programme commencement is deliberate, since it enables behaviour patterns to become established. It also allows the doctor and psychologist to be seen in a non-threatening light, while bonds of familiarity can be formed with the teacher. A child may stay at Chidley for a period of three to six months.

To help with the problem of ensuring adequate follow-up once a child returns home, several initiatives have been taken. Firstly, parents are encouraged to spend some time at the centre and secondly, teachers and principals to whom the child returns, are involved in in-service training at the centre.

In addition to the Chidley Point Remedial Centre, a mobile remedial service has recently been established. This service enables a trained remedial teacher to visit isolated children who are in need of remediation. These children are referred to the service by the regional superintendent, or principal of the Correspondence School.

4.3.2. Aboriginal Children

Of the 12 063 Aboriginal children enrolled in schools throughout the State in 1979, by far the greater concentration is to found in the sparsely populated areas of the State. Forty-seven per cent of these students attend schools in the Kimberley, Goldfields, Pilbara and Geraldton regions. In addition, most Aboriginal students - eighty six per cent - attend Government schools. Many Aboriginal students attend specially designated Aborignal schools, in which the student population is predominantly Aboriginal, while the other Aboriginal students attend schools in which students are not exclusively Aboriginal. The Education Department has a number of programmes designed to cater for the special needs and characteristscs of Aboriginal students who attend both types of school

There are twenty-one Aboriginal Schools conducted by the Education Department of W.A., which cater for fifteen per cent of the Aboriginal student population. Some of these schools have enrolments of less than 20, whilst others have more than 300 students. They are located in Aboriginal communities on reserve land, on cattle stations and missions, and in towns where there is a predominantly Aboriginal population. Because characteristics of these schools vary with the needs of their particular situation, it would be misleading to present a generalized picture of many aspects of these schools. However, their educational programmes endeavour to accommodate and capitalize on the particular characteristics of the child's experience. This involves recognition of such factors as the varying degree to which Aboriginal children are exposed to Western experiences, such as books, radio and so on. Increasingly, in communities where traditional life-styles are evident, the schools encourage students to maintain pride in their own culture by having traditional Aborigines visit the school, telling stories and making and demonstrating art and crafts. In the majority of Special Aboriginal Schools, non-Aboriginal teachers are assisted by Aboriginal aides. In addition, teachers receive assistance in programming from advisory staff, and the Aboriginal Education Branch also runs seminars and workshops.

Complementing these Special Aboriginal Schools, the Education Department employs single men as itinerant advisory teachers, who operate a regular schedule around a number of traditional Aboriginal communities. As well as teaching children themselves, they devote considerable time to the support of Aboriginal aides, who assist with the teaching programmes in these communities.

Recognition of the special needs of Aboriginal students has led the Education Department to adopt a number of other strategies which are not unique to the Special Aboriginal Schools. For instance, additional teaching staff are deployed in schools with a large enrolment where under-achievement is evident amongst a large proportion of Aborigines. To allocate these staff, the Staffing Branch uses criteria such as enrolment, proportion of Aborigines to total enrolment, location of the school, and social complexity of the community in which the school is situated.

In addition to being employed as classroom aides, Aborigines are employed by the Education Department in several other capacities. Firstly, if communication between teacher and students, or school personnel and the community, create difficulties in the learning programme, principals may seek assistance from an Aboriginal person to facilitate communication. These teacher aides come from within the immediate community, but attend induction and in-service courses, which are conducted during school vacations.

Similarly, in communities where large multi-cultural groups exist, the problem of establishing and maintaining a dialogue between the school and the community becomes extremely difficult. The appointment of an Aboriginal Liaison person is seen as one method of improving communications and co-ordinating the functions of the various social agencies which operate in the community. Responsibility for inducting and training liaison officers to meet local needs or to cater for individual abilities of selected officers is vested in the most senior Education Department officer in the region of operation.

In addition, a number of other initiatives have been undertaken to cater for the needs of Aboriginal students enrolled in the schools in which students are not exclusively Aboriginal. For instance, the Education Department has undertaken a programme entitled 'Project Education' which, in 1976, catered for 289 students in ten schools in the Kimberleys, Pilbara, Geraldton and Eastern Goldfields districts. The 25 full-time and nine part-time staff use teaching cottages as ancillary services to cater for low-achieving secondary school students. The students are taught skills relevant to future employment: boys do mechanics, woodwork, metalwork and crafts; girls concentrate on homemaking, grooming and deportment. Teaching cottages also concentrate on homemaking, grooming and deportment. Teaching cottages also provide individual study units, teaching aids, reading laboratory materials, mathematics games and so on. A reduction of student-teacher ratio in this project has enabled students to receive more individual attention and has permitted a diversified approach to their education. Aspects of cognitive development are closely associated with physical activities and the acquisition of manual and special skills. Attitudinal changes occur as the result of the achievement of success and satisfaction at school.

Course development responsibilities are shared between those working in the field and officers stationed at Head Office. As a result of this dichotomy of responsibility, a significant diversity of courses can be observed. Each centre in the project is also responsible for the preparation of a requisition for supplies. The provision of materials

and equipment is dependent upon rational course planning. Importance is placed upon providing students with experiences in budgeting, purchasing and conducting trading transactions. To achieve this aim, local purchasing is encouraged. A contingency fund is provided at each centre for this purpose.

Other initiatives for changes to both course content and school organization, which make them more appropriate to the particular needs of Aboriginal children, occur at all levels, from the classroom to the educational researcher. As needs are identified, specific educational programmes are developed. Indeed, many facilities have been developed as a result of these programmes, including, for example, a bridging programme, which is designed to assist the child who enters school with a different experiential and language background from children of the social mainstream group.

Similarly, in addition to specific curriculum material which has been prepared and distributed by the Aboriginal Education Branch, a large volume of support material has emanated from the Aboriginal Education Resources Unit in which the Education Department has an administrative and decision-making role. Activities of this unit, which is financed by the Commonwealth Government Department of Aboriginal Affairs, are supervised by a committee which represents several agencies involved in the education of Aboriginal students, including the Catholic Education Commission and the Education Department of Western Australia. Its main aim is to provide resource materials for the use of both Aboriginal students and their teachers.

In terms of equipment and material appropriate to the needs of Aboriginal students, provision is made in a number of ways. For instance, in addition to normal stock issue, schools receive an annual per capita grant on behalf of every Aborigine enrolled. Expediture guidelines are provided to school principals to help maximize benefits to students. Also, supplementary supplies of material and equipment are provided on a needs basis, or as a result of schools wishing to embark on a viable educational programme which is beyond their normal resources. In addition, stocks of equipment are available on loan from the Aboriginal Education Branch.

Advisory support staff in the form of one secondary and two primary advisory teachers operate in the field to assist teachers. They help develop teaching methods and strategies which are appropriate to the needs of Aboriginal students, and assist in the preparation and adaption of educational programmes. Introduction of syllabus and curriculum material which has been developed by the Aboriginal Education Branch is facilitated by the conducting of Teacher Development Workshops and Seminars. In these Teacher Development Programmes, three major types of courses are supported. These include:

1. Teacher initiated workshops, which are planned and conducted in a location to satisfy a local need. Financial aid is offered to organizing groups.

2. Branch-organized and conducted seminars and workshops. Seminars of this type are specific in their aim and generally focus on an identified area of general need.

3. Induction courses for teachers newly appointed to schools with a large Aboriginal population.

These courses are facilitated by funds provided by the Australian Government and administered by the Aboriginal Education Branch. Personnel involved in planning and implementing the programme are selected on the basis of the particular nature of the course.

In addition to these feature which are designed to provide relevent educational experiences to Aboriginal children, a programme has been developed which aims to widen the social experiences of Aboriginal students, particularly those who reside in remote areas. Thus, every three years, schools submit plans for financial assistance for planned excursions and visits which are an integral part of their learning programme.

In terms of comparison of achievement levels of Aboriginal with non-Aboriginal students, or Aboriginal students at different types of schools, there is little objective evidence. A large survey of all schools in Western Australia which enrolled Aboriginal students utilized teacher perception measures as a guage for achievement comparisons. This survey showed (Tannock & Punch, 1975 p.23) for primary school students, achievement of Aborigines is judged by teachers to be below average in reading, oral and written language skills, mathematics and social studies. However, in art and craft and music, Aboriginal students were judged equal and in physical education they were judged to be superior to non-Aboriginal students. It is interesting to note that teachers' judgements showed no significant difference between Aboriginal students in special Aboriginal schools or in ordinary schools (Tannock & Punch, 1975, p.26).

4.3.3 The Disadvantaged Country Areas Program (DCAP)

In Australia, it is recognized that the problems facing education in sparsely populated areas stem from a complex interaction of isolation, ethnic and social factors. To combat this educational disadvantage of rural areas, the Schools Commission in 1977 instituted a joint Government and non-Government schools project called the Disadvantaged Country Areas Program which, in Western Australia, has an annual expenditure in the vicinity of three-quarters of a million dollars. The aim of this project is to identify needs common to certain areas, which are related to isolation, ethic or social background factors. After identification of these needs, programmes are proposed by local people to meet these needs for both the Government and non-Government schools within a broad geographic area. Thus, the programme provides funds for the development of facilities, resources and services to be shared amongst country schools whose pupils are educationally disadvantaged, and which are so placed to be able to share in the planning and use of services provided. Its operation enables parents and community members to participate in the development of proposals and thus constitutes a new approach to educational planning and spending. In addition, it enables projects to be evaluated as prototypes for possible application in other areas.

Since 1977, the Goldfields area and isolated children in the Western Australian Correspondence School have been amongst the areas included in this programme, and in 1979 the Kimberley Region is to be included as well.

In each area, working parties are formed. They usually have 10-15 members, including school principals and community representatives. These working parties develop proposals for overcoming perceived disadvantages for children in the area and submit them, usually through a regional group, to a State Committee for approval. The State Committee has representatives from both Government and non-Government school systems. In addition, several field officers and an evaluation officer are employed to assist working parties in communication, administration and evaluation activities.

To date, an interesting variety of projects has been developed within DCAP. For instance, many classroom-related resources, based either in schools or in resource centres, have been provided. In addition, travel related activities have been popular, with students being bussed on excursions or to camps in areas both within their own district and further afield. Community-involvement activities have been frequent, including activities such as conducting parent seminars to better inform parents of the activities of the school. Similarly, large-scale special projects have been financed. For example, in the Goldfields, a residential camp school, with an associated remedial clinic has been developed. In conjunction with this, remedial advisory services have been provided for teachers throughout the district.

Activities undertaken for correspondence children have had the bringing of parents, teachers and children into regular contact as a prime focus. Other projects have extended the social, cultural and educational opportunities of students by providing workshops and camps and by distributing resource kits.

It is anticipated that the DCAP will be extended in the near future. Through this programme, the educational provision for children in isolated areas can be made both more relevant and more effective by being directly related to the special needs of each community.

4.3.4. Rural Integration Programme

Compulsory education for children commences in the year in which they turn six. The government does, however, provide wherever possible a year of pre-primary education on a free and voluntary basis. New Government primary schools are established with a pre-primary centre. Progressively, additional buildings are being provided to existing primary schools without such a facility. The provision of such facilities in very small rural communities is not, however, economically viable. To overcome this problem, the Education Department initiated in 1976 a scheme known as the Rural Integration Programme. The key feature of this scheme is the inclusion of up to 10 pre-primary children in the school under the supervision of the Year 1 teacher. Naturally, the numbers which can be included depends on the size of the Year 1 class and the adequacy of facilities. Pre-primary children can attend the school on four half-days per week.

A critical element in the success of the Rural Integration Programme is the provision of adequate teacher support. Whenever pre-primary children attend school under this scheme, a teacher aide is appointed. Special in-service programmes for teachers and aides have also been instituted. The in-service activities usually involve one full day, with relief teachers provided for those schools with staff attending the in-service programme.

The programme provided in the school to the pre-primary children is informal, and focuses on the emotional and social development of children, providing opportunities for language and vocabulary development, and for physical, cultural and cognitive development. The programmes are designed to enhance a child's present growth, as well as improving a child's chances of success in later, more formal learning situations. Parents are encouraged to join in various aspects of the programme.

The Rural Integration Programme centres are scattered throughout the State. They include a number in the outer metropolitan regions, where schools are sufficiently small not to warrant, at that stage of their growth, construction of a separate pre-primary centre. In February, 1979, there were 73 Rural Integration Centres established. Of those located in the more remote regions of the State, five are situated in the Goldfields, two in the Pilbara region, two in the Kimberleys, and six in the Geraldton region. These centres are in addition to the 270 pre-primary centres which operate throughout the State.

4.4. Conclusion

The problems of isolation, of cultural heterogeneity, and of scarcity of facilities and resources are day to day features of life for many Western Australian. The provisions which have been described in this Chapter are specifically designed to meet these special needs of people who live in sparsely populated areas.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has described the means by which education is provided for children who live in the more isolated regions of Western Australia. The record of the Education Department in this area is impressive, especially after taking into account the special problems that can be attributed to the sheer size of the jurisdiction over which it has administrative responsibility. The achievements of the Department are indicative of the State's commitment to eliminate, or reduce as far as possible, any educational disadvantage that might be derived from living away from the urban and larger town centres. Equality of educational standards has been accomplished through subsidization of the costs of facilities and services, and by ingenuity of educationalists in developing special measures of coping with the problems of distance and isolation. From the inception of the Correspondence School in 1918 down to the present day innovations such as the Chidley Centre and Isolated Students Matriculation Scheme, Western Australian initiatives have won international attention and acclaim.

Although the discussion in this paper focuses on how education overcomes the special problems of sparsely populated areas, it is important to be aware of the positive aspects of rural education.

Schools in isolated areas are frequently characterized by practices which in urban settings are considered to be innovative and highly desirable. For example, the smaller classes of many rural schools encourages a climate of school community and the development of deeper relationships between teacher and pupils. Teachers in smaller schools routinely utilize procedures such as cross-age and cross-ability groupings. Opportunities more frequently arise for older pupils to assist the younger ones. The local environment is rich with opportunities for environmental science and social studies. As well, schools in sparsely populated areas are more closely allied to the community than is usual in urban areas.

No doubt there will continue to be improvements made in the quality and quantity of services provided for rural communities. However, it could well be that some of the most significant development in education in sparsely populated areas in the next few years will be of a qualitative kind. Thus, although remoteness and distance will continue to provide hurdles that must be cleared, recognizing and implicating the unique features of rural education may become the real challenge. There is a growing realisation that rural children should not be regarded as 'disadvantaged' with respect to education, but that education should be exploiting the positive features of rural living.

Public expenditure has a ceiling which ultimately determines what further resources can be committed. The needs of urban and rural communities must compete for these finite resources. In a true economic downturn, the issue of relative needs assumes a special importance. It is to be hoped that one effect of such a tightening on expenditure might be to lead rural communities and educationalists to rethink the special requirements of their school, a process which must lead to improved quality of education in these areas.

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